

Over the last year, and especially over the last few months, a number of editorials have been published in the Times & Transcript and the Telegraph Journal on the topics of health, education, bilingualism and duality. In most of these cases, the arguments used were either misinterpretations of facts or simply wrong and they have contributed to stoking the flames of discontent, thereby creating unnecessary division and increased tensions between communities.

More recently, some editorialists and opponents of bilingualism have been quick to point to duality in education and health as being the main culprit for the province's unfavourable fiscal situation and the large debt of 10 billion dollars accumulated over a number of years by successive governments. They should know that provinces such as Nova Scotia and Ontario are not officially bilingual and yet face fiscal situations that are every bit as bad if not worse than ours.

Let's look at some facts. The New Brunswick francophone population represents about 33% of the total population. Our linguistic rights and access to our own educational and cultural institutions have been guaranteed in the Canadian Constitution. Over the years, NB Acadians and Francophones have governed their own school system in order to develop a curriculum that would better represent their culture and values. Some would turn back the clock and return to bilingual schools even though it has been widely proven that bilingual schools are tools of assimilation. The cost arguments used by these same opponents don't stand up to scrutiny. Even if every New Brunswick school offered English only education, the savings would be minimal. By using the same number of students per teacher and the same school sizes, we would still need the same number of teachers and approximately the same number of schools. School buses would still have to transport students to and from schools; so not much saving there. The same applies in health. Minimal savings would be realized even if all services were delivered in English. By applying the Canadian average for doctors/per 1000 population, hospital beds or specialized services, savings would be negligible.

The duplication of services that anti-bilingualism proponents say is costing too much money is in fact a reality; a reality that exists mostly in the Horizon Health Network. Yes, this type of duplication of services costs all taxpayers, Anglophones and Francophones, more money. We know that this issue has spurred considerable discussion and even some dissention between and within both linguistic communities. We also recognize that some of Horizon's health institutions have made efforts to better serve Francophones in their own language, but a real imbalance still exists in this regard. We believe that in order to balance the availability of tertiary services, newly introduced services should be made available within the Vitality Health Network and we are certain that serving all New Brunswickers in the official language of their choice need not cost more.

We are tired of seeing Acadians and Francophones being used as scapegoats each time the fiscal situation of the province deteriorates. It is also very frustrating to see that editorials and some prominent members of the Anglophone community so blatantly misrepresent the aspirations of the francophone community and its desire for equal

rights. This serves only to foster hatred and division, and we don't believe they represent the views of the large majority of Anglophones in New Brunswick or those of the owners of these newspapers. The cumulative effect has been to confuse the Anglophone readers as to the real aspirations of Acadians and Francophones in NB and to portray us as being unwilling to engage with the Anglophone majority and compromise in the interest of all of us. That is just not true. Dialogue and compromise are at the core of the Acadian value-system and they have allowed us to survive against all odds.

Arguments that bilingualism is costly leave the impression that the Acadians and Francophones in this province don't pay taxes, don't contribute to our economic development and don't pay their fair share. The reality is that

Acadians and Francophones are part of the richness of New Brunswick and will continue to participate and contribute to the development of this beautiful province.

As business people, we have to look at both sides of a financial statement. Those opposing bilingualism often look only at the cost. Let's look at the other side: the advantages yielded by what we consider to be investments in the fundamental identity of the province.

A large part of the economic development strategy of this province has been built around the fact that our province boasts a bilingual population. Time and time again, we have heard Premiers, ministers, and industrial development agencies make presentations around the country and around the world about the advantage of relocating to New Brunswick, because we could serve them in both official languages. And jobs did come, more than 7,000 of them in call centres, medium to high paying jobs that have created several billion dollars of wages over the last 20 years and many millions of dollars of new government revenues to help pay for the public services we all use.

We could point as well to the communications industry, the language and translation industry, the art sector, the creation of companies by the graduates of the Université de Moncton and the francophone community college? A large portion of our tourists come from our neighbouring province of Québec; millions are spent each year because they come to see our Acadian artists, our festivals and savour our seafood. In every sector of the economy, francophones and Anglophones work and invest side by side to create a more prosperous province.

We are all proud New Brunswickers. We have lived in relative harmony over the last 20 years. We have contributed economically, socially and culturally to the development of this province and our tax dollars are worth as much as anyone else's tax dollars.

The time has come for those of us who believe in justice, fairness and equality to stand up and be counted. The future of this province depends on it. New Brunswick deserves better. We have come a long way and we have a long and tough road yet to

travel, but we can only achieve the goals we hold dear in a spirit of mutual respect, honesty and cooperation. We will all be much better off if we focus on what unites us rather than what divides us.

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3. Aldéo Saulnier, maire de Bouctouche
4. Alexis Couture
5. Anatole Godin
6. Anika Lurette
7. Anne Hébert, CÉNB
8. Armand Caron, président – CCNB
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10. Bernard Cyr
11. Bernard Imbeault
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13. Bernard Thériault
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29. Diane Deschênes, présidente, Maison de la culture à Shippagan
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31. Dr Louis Thériault
32. Dre Elaine Deschênes
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- 116. Vicky Caron
- 117. Yvon Fontaine
- 118. Yvon Lapierre, maire de Dieppe
- 119. Yvon Poitras